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SUBJECT: EBRAHIM YAZDI ON US POLICY AND IRAN'S FUTURE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian Burns, Director, Iran Regional Presence
Office, DoS.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

11. (S//NF) Summary: Former foreign minister and leader of Freedom Party of Iran Dr. Ebrahim Yazdi (please protect) discussed his views of US policies on Iran with IRPoff Feb 20 when he came to Dubai to collect his US visa. Yazdi expressed his view that US policy on Iran is flawed and unclear, arguing, that economic sanctions against Iran harm the people, but will do nothing to change the Iranian government's behavior. Rather than imposing economic sanctions on Iran, the US should encourage trade and economic development in Iran, Yazdi said. Although he thought the Iranian government should accept the P5+1 offer and cease uranium enrichment, he believed that some parts of that plan were flawed as well. Yazdi also criticized VOA programming, saying that in his view the programming is not only anti-Iran, but also anti-Islam. On the future of Iranian politics, Yazdi dismissed the likelihood of gradual reform in Iran; he believed the current system would eventually implode due to inherent systemic flaws. Yazdi's views on the upcoming Majles elections will be reported septel. End summary.

Yazdi on US policy

12. (S//NF) Yazdi expressed his view in a Feb 20 meeting with IRPoff that US policy on Iran is flawed and unclear. "Iranians don't know what the US wants," he said, implying whether regime change is a US goal or not. Although he said that his political party, the banned Freedom Party, had expressed support for the P5+1 offer in exchange for suspension of enrichment and reprocessing and thought the Iranian government should accept it, he said that some parts of the plan were flawed. Giving an example of what he viewed as a flaw in the P5+1 offer, Dr. Yazdi said the US should support rather than oppose plans for pipelines from central Asia through Iran, and between Iran, Pakistan, and India, because it has the potential to benefit the entire region. Yazdi also opposed economic sanctions against Iran, arguing that they negatively impact the Iranian people,

but will do nothing to change the behavior of the Iranian government. Rather than imposing economic sanctions on Iran, the US should encourage trade and economic development in Iran, he said. Economic liberalization, he argued, would be more likely to foster political reform than economic sanctions.

VOA

13. (S//NF) On Voice of America's Persian language programming, Yazdi expressed his view that reporting often lacks credibility and is too harsh-not just against Iran, but against Islam also. He repeatedly called the programming "anti-Islam." Asked about specific programs, statements, or presenters he found offensive, Dr. Yazdi demurred, but was still emphatic about his assessment of VOA. VOA is run by monarchists, Yazdi said, who have a clear agenda of regime change, but also do not have any idea what conditions in Iran are like and are out of touch with the Iranian public.

The Iranian revolution and the future of Iranian politics

4.(S//NF) Yazdi compared the Iranian revolution to the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, saying both had created governments that were systemically flawed and not sustainable. He predicted that the current system of government in Iran would crumble due to internal weaknesses, not external intervention. He repeated comments he made in a February 16, 2008 interview with the New York Times, saying that democracy cannot be imported, that it must emerge indigenously. Yazdi dismissed the likelihood of gradual reform in Iran, reiterating his view that the current system would eventually implode. What differentiated the Iranian revolution from the Russian revolution, he added, was that the communist revolution was based on an ideology that was discarded after the system fell. Iran's revolution, he

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insisted, was based on Islam, which will survive the fall of the Islamic Republic.

Bio background

15. (U) Yazdi is a US-educated medical doctor who served as the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic in 1979, during the interim government of Mehdi Bazargan. He resigned along with the rest of the interim cabinet following the seizure of the US Embassy in Tehran in November 1979. He was one of the founding members and is currently the head of the Freedom Movement of Iran, which is banned by the Iranian government from participation in politics. Yazdi registered as a candidate in the 2005 presidential election, but was disqualified by the Guardian Council.

6.(S//NF) IRPO met Yazdi on February 20 to deliver his US non-immigrant visa, our second meeting with Yazdi (reftel). Yazdi, who is 76 and a former legal permanent resident, is currently in the US for medical treatment and to visit his Amciti children. He said he has received several speaking invitations from US universities (Stanford, Columbia, and Ohio universities were some he named) but has not yet decided whether he will accept any of them. Yazdi reported having difficulty with UAE authorities upon arrival. Security officials at the Dubai airport held his passport upon arrival and asked him to return the following day for questioning. However, he said his passport was returned to him the next day without extensive questioning. Yazdi said that the UAE immigration officials were apologetic on the second day and said they only wanted his opinion about the current state of Iranian politics.

17. (S//NF) Comment: While Yazdi is not an influential player in

today's political scene in Iran and clearly had no chance of being allowed to run for president in 2005, his views of the situation in Iran are worth reporting. He was there at the birth of the Islamic Republic and knows the system from the inside out. His views of US policy may be colored by difficulties he has had in recent years over visa-related issues, but his belief that US trade with Iran will have more impact on Iranian political culture than sanctions is shared by many Iranians. Many of the Iranians who share this view are from the business sector, who of course have a vested interest in seeing sanctions lifted. End comment.

BURNS